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CIA Role Seen in General's Fall

Agency Said to Back Honduran's Right-Wing Rivals

By Anne-Marie O'Connor
Reporter

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras, Feb. 8—The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency played a decisive part in events that led to the removal of Honduras' armed forces commander in a military power struggle last week, according to Honduran military and foreign diplomatic sources.

Although it was not directly involved in the departure of Gen. Walter Lopez Reyes, the CIA backed a group of right-wing officers who pressured him into resigning and sought to isolate a group of junior officers who wanted Honduras to take a more independent line from the United States, they said.

Lopez Reyes said last week he was resigning

for personal reasons from the post of armed forces commander, considered the most powerful position in Honduras.

Military sources said he quit because of a dispute over the U.S.-backed Nicaraguan guerrillas known as contras, or counterrevolutionaries, operating from Honduras. They also said his increasingly independent manner of making policy decisions irritated fellow officers.

Lopez Reyes later said he had changed his mind and wanted to stay, but the 48-member Armed Forces Superior Council ignored this and accepted his resignation Feb. 1. Col. Efraim Gonzalez has taken his place for the time being.

U.S. Embassy officials said they were unable to comment on intelligence matters when questioned about the alleged CIA involvement in the military upheaval. Embassy spokesman Arthur

Skop said it was "an internal affair of the Honduran military in which the United States was not involved."

[A CIA spokeswoman in Washington said she would not comment "on allegations of agency activities."]

Honduras' armed forces, which control political power from behind the scenes, share Washington's view that Nicaragua is threatening stability by trying to spread Marxist revolution in the region.

But a younger group of nationalist officers, ashamed of what they interpreted as Honduras' blind subservience to U.S. interests, had begun to criticize their country's foreign policy, the sources said.

They wanted Honduras to adopt a more independent line, restrict the activities of the contras and obtain more U.S. aid, the sources said.

The CIA sought to isolate this group of officers, which it feared would disrupt American policy. Their leaders were purged from command positions in December following a shake-up in military ranks that strengthened their right-wing rivals.